

The Council of Nicaea,

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zeal gained a remarkable ascendancy over the mind of his superior. This display of a man—for he was of very slender build and insignificant stature—was to lay at Nicaea the sure foundations of his extraordinary and unparalleled fame as the champion of the Catholic Faith.

So the Council assembled in the June of 325 in the charming city of Nicaea, on the shores of the Ascanian lake. The intense interest which it aroused was not confined to those who were to take part in it, or even to the Christian population of the city and district. It spread, so we are expressly told, to those who still clung to the old religion. Debates on the nature of the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Christ would be almost as welcome and absorbing to a Neo-Platonist philosopher as to a Christian bishop. His pleasure in the intellectual exercise was marred by no anxiety lest it should result in disturbance of happy and settled belief. When the Greek met Greek they began forthwith to argue, and so, without waiting for the Council formally to open, the early arrivals at Nicaea commenced their discussions with all comers on the question of the hour.

The story of one of those informal encounters is told by most of the ecclesiastical writers. A certain pagan philosopher was holding forth with great fluency and making mock of the Christian mysteries, to the amusement of a number of bystanders. Finally, his challenge of contradiction was accepted by a simple old man, one of the confessors of the persecution, who knew nothing of dialectics. As he moved forward to answer the seneschal there was a burst of